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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
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INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1892
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 8916
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7154
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5116
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3288
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5072
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1349
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0607
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4182
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9481
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6782
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 1278
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3723
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000876

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/10/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKAN OFFICIALS REJECT FREEDOM OF IDP
MOVEMENT ARGUMENTS

REF: A. SECSTATE 92641
[1](#)B. COLOMBO 872

COLOMBO 00000876 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: DCM JAMES R. MOORE. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

FOREIGN MINISTER BOGOLLAGAMA

[1](#)1. (C) On September 9, Charge delivered ref. A freedom of movement points to Foreign Minister Bogollagama and was met with a predictable response. The FM said these points were nothing new and the GSL appreciated our continued interest. He repeated the request for us to help purchase heavy demining machinery, saying that demining was the critical choke point preventing greater returns of IDPs. Charge pointed out that if progress was seen on freedom of movement, the USG might well consider assisting with the purchase of heavy flail equipment. Bogollagama said that only through working with the GSL and undertaking assistance that "worked in Sri Lanka" would the U.S. get the maximum results from our good intentions. Bogollagama said the GSL was the source of the 180-day plan and that having set such a goal, they were trying to achieve it now. He said the president planned to call for presidential elections in January, and did not intend to have large numbers of IDPs still in camps by then. Bogollagama said the GSL was expecting as many as an additional 60,000 IDPs to be returned by the end of September.

PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR BASIL RAJAPAKSA

[1](#)2. (C) Later on September 9, Charge also discussed ref. A freedom of movement points in detail with the president's brother and senior advisor Basil Rajapaksa, noting that it had been three months since the end of the war and most IDPs remained in camps, even while the imminent monsoon rains

threatened to cause a humanitarian catastrophe. Basil was no less intransigent on the freedom of movement issue than the president (ref B) or FM, though he was able to offer some positive news on registration of IDPs and demining. He said 169,000 IDPs had now been registered with 117,000 having been issued new temporary IDP cards (NOTE: Post has been told that permanent national identity cards cannot be issued until the IDPs return to their permanent residences. END NOTE) He claimed that all nuclear families within the camps had been re-united and they were working on the extended families. He also claimed that preparations (unspecified) had been made for the monsoon and that "no humanitarian crisis would occur."

13. (C) On demining, Basil showed us photos of five demining flail machines that had just arrived from Slovenia and photos of five more that would soon come from Croatia. This brought the total number of demining machines to 21 (13 with the SL Army and eight with INGOs). The machines greatly sped up demining, he claimed, increasing efficiency exponentially. But the process was still slow, Basil argued, and allowing IDPs to move out of the camps "prematurely" would put them at risk. The U.S. could help if it provided additional flail machines, to which Charge responded that the U.S. would consider further assistance IF the GSL allowed freedom of movement. Basil stated he would make sure that the maximum was being done to help the IDPs and he wanted the U.S. to believe him when he said that. But, at the same time, it was important not to put conditions on assistance because "when coming from outside -- even if it is a good idea or something we're already doing -- we resist."

COMMENT

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14. (C) The Foreign Minister is not a key decision-maker on IDP issues, and this showed in his more general responses to the freedom of movement demarche. What his comments do show is a fairly coordinated approach of the GSL in their interactions with us on IDP issues. On the other hand, Basil Rajapaksa is the key civilian player in the GSL on the IDP issue -- at least in terms of operational details. His eagerness to show us facts and figures on registrations and demining indicate that he is trying to demonstrate the GSL is listening to some of our concerns. Like his brothers, however, he still showed no sign of willingness to compromise on the freedom of movement issue. The GSL's experience of quick resettlement of IDPs in the east, he argued, showed their proven track record in expediting returns. He urged us to trust the government, to support the government with direct assistance in the form of flails, and to understand that they are committed to large-scale returns as soon as progress on demining permits.

BUTENIS